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## *Of What Benefit Is The Church Today?*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

More particularly, of what benefit is the Episcopal Church? More particularly still, of what benefit is our church, the Episcopal Cathedral of St. Philip? Let me repeat three particular themes which help to answer those questions. They are themes which I have tried to include in everything we do in this grand parish.

1) The first theme is "spirited Christian formation." The church is meant to be the community where we learn "spirited Christian formation."

"Spirited" means "in the Spirit." This means we acknowledge and use the power of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, to guide and direct and teach us. Every day we face questions and even crises which have no easy answers-not even any easy Christian answers. We need the power of the Spirit to lead us into all truth.

"Spirited" also means "exciting" and "vibrant." Church is supposed to be a place that excites and stimulates us. It should not be dull. Our music, our teaching, our personality, our service, our outreach, our food, should have zing of spiritedness to it. Why should anyone be part of a church community that is dull?

The Church is also the place where we learn "Christian formation." Our families and households are where we learn the most about Christian formation, but our Sunday and Wednesday and any-day experiences of Christian community are meant to teach us as well. There are plenty of great charities and non-profit organizations around; the Church is the one who purports to teach age-old virtues of faith, hope, and love. The Church, in how we teach and act, teaches the values of truth, honor, respect, and grace. We learn these virtues, and these values, through the incessant enactment of the Christian story; we teach the Christian story, we pray the Christian story, we sing the Christian story.

2) The second theme worth repeating is that the Church is the laboratory where we learn forgiveness. Again, many organizations and institutions teach ethics good will, but it is another thing entirely to teach forgiveness. In order to teach forgiveness, we must forgive. We forgive folks who speak ill of us, who have hurt us, who have damaged us.

We all know we are supposed to love one another; but when we gather in churches, we are given the fleshly opportunities to actually do so. We have to put love into action with our neighbors, many of whom are not like us! Most often, we learn to do this by forgiving one another. If someone hurts us, a part of us wants to hurt them back. Another part of us wants to separate and leave, to never talk to that person again. But the Christian spirit in us knows that we must forgive. The church is meant to be that laboratory where we test forgiveness. We learn forgiveness.

3) The third theme worth repeating, the third benefit of church life, is that the world around us needs the example of folks living together in love and forgiveness and witness. We have a witness, a mission. The Church makes a witness to those outside us when we continue to gather together and when we continue to cling to each other.

Yes, the world needs the Cathedral of St. Philip. It is the world who needs the Christian Church, and the Episcopal Church. Have you noticed that we in the Church tend to discuss the same social issues and social conflicts that the culture around us discusses? This is inevitable in every generation. Of what good is the Church in talking about those same issues?

I believe the good comes in the Church being able to offer a different contribution. The Church is meant to offer a different answer to social disputes than simply the "liberal" or the "conservative" position. The Church is meant to be neither "Republican" or "Democrat," when it comes to politically charged arguments.

The world around us needs a contribution to social issues that comes "from above," that is, a word from the transcendent and grace-ful God. Can we find that Word? I hope so. The world around us needs a witness, a witness that shows grace. Let us speak that grace; let us speak grace to one another and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler